



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 2 EPISODE 8 (early-OCT 2020)

VAN GOGH ALIVE in Sydney

HYBRID at the Powerhouse Museum

SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY On-Line

VAN GOGH ALIVE

Tim Stackpool:

First let's head to Sydney's Entertainment Quarter, and the bold step by M Agency to stage Van Gogh Alive while significant COVID restrictions remain in place. Together with creator, Bruce Peterson of Grande Exhibitions, Van Gogh Alive could well be one of the first purpose built, COVID aware major arts and entertainment initiatives in Sydney. We'll hear from Melbourne based Bruce Peterson about the origins of Van Gogh Alive, but first given that this has been a year of uncertainty and changing government restrictions, what would drive anyone to take the risk of planning a significant public event? Let alone staging it. Here's a little of what M Agency CEO, Emma Triggs said at the press conference prior to the opening.

Emma Triggs:

I'm thrilled to be presenting Van Gogh Alive right here, right now at a time when we all need the opportunity to reconnect with the beauty of art, and rediscovered joy in what has been the most traumatic of years. This installation is very special. It is the biggest version of Van Gogh Alive that has ever been seen, and it is up to about three times larger than any one that has been in production before. We're using 36 of the highest definition projectors, the equivalent of 30 IMAX screens, some up to seven metres high. More than 83 million pixels of content, along with cinema surround sound. You'll soon have the chance to immerse yourselves in Van Gogh Alive where you'll discover over 2000 sketches, drawings and paintings in the largest collection of his works ever presented at the one time. Many of you know me as the founder and CEO of the M Agency servicing the arts and entertainment sectors. At the beginning of the year, we're at the top of our game. We were scaling to new heights that we'd never been before.

Emma Triggs:

Then COVID struck and all of our arts and entertainment clients events were canceled. Suddenly we had no work, and like so many other businesses, this year, we nearly fell off a cliff. At this point for us, there were two options. Either sit back and wait for events to return to normal and wait for our money to run out, or to find a new way to utilise the skills on our team and invest everything we have into something new quickly. So, I decided it was time to be bold, it was time to innovate. It was time to find a new way to do what we do best and get back to work, and after seeing Van Gogh Alive last year while overseas, I thought it could be perfect for us. The content is inspiring and timeless, and the experience was as safe as possible due to the no touch nature of the environment. We also thought Vincent Van Gogh was a perfect artist to spotlight. He lived in a very tumultuous time. He had a very difficult life. We can all relate to something like that right now.

Emma Triggs:

Yet, despite his challenges, he still managed to appreciate the beauty around him and his works have brought so much joy to the many generations over the 100 plus years since his death. So, I reached out to Bruce Peterson, the owner of Grande Exhibitions, the creators of Van Gogh Alive to see if we could license it for Sydney, and luckily for us due to COVID, Bruce was able to grant that license. This initiative has created jobs, it's saved businesses and is helping to bring this precinct and the businesses all around it back to life. I urge the government to review the arts and entertainment support assessment criteria so that they can assist initiatives like this one in the future (applause). Thank you. This has been an

enormous project, one that has taken off at a rapid rate of knots, and I'm so glad that I found something to save us all and keep us in our jobs.

Tim Stackpool:

Emma Triggs there. The CEO of M Agency staging Van Gogh Alive in Sydney at the moment. Van Gogh Alive is a large scale, multi-sensory experience that has inspired over 6 million people across 50 cities around the world, and has been staged in places like Rome, Milan, Berlin, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Moscow, and there's many others, but what many people may not have been aware of is it is the brainchild of Melbourne based Bruce Peterson, and being in Melbourne due to travel restrictions, Bruce had to speak at the media launch remotely on screen

Bruce Peterson:

Van Gogh Alive is pretty special to us. We've conducted now 190 exhibitions around the world in some 32 languages, over 140 cities. We've seen 17, 18 million visitors, but this is only the third time that we've displayed in Australia. So, something that we're very, very proud of in particular being able to achieve in this particular challenging moment in time. The journey for myself and Grande really started 15 years ago when I moved to Italy with my young family to create the most comprehensive exhibition on Leonardo da Vinci that had ever been undertaken, and it was during the multiple visits to some of the great museums and galleries in Florence and Rome, in particular, that really led me on this pathway because five or 10 minutes into those experiences, my young kids were tapping me on the shoulder saying, "Dad, this is boring. Let's go get a gelato." And I really couldn't quite work out at the time why it was not of interest to them like it was to me, but on investigation, they were just telling me that, look, without things moving it just wasn't exciting.

Bruce Peterson:

And without music, it definitely wasn't exciting, and this was also the time when the kids were starting to engage on electronic devices more and more. So, that really set us on a pathway of starting to develop multimedia experiences, and we were the first to do so and we started this back in 2010, and no one had undertaken it at that time, and it took us a good two years to work out the whole system of how to do that. And here we are now, nearly 10 years later, and really we've moved from multimedia now to multi-sensory. So, what we're trying to do with Van Gogh Alive, and hopefully you can appreciate that it's linking all the human senses together and synchronising those, and therefore you, as a visitor, will get a more emotional outcome and more of an amplified outcome. This really is a culmination of many, many, many years of great work. This experience has constantly been upgraded, adapted, changed, improved, worked on to make it the experience that it is today.

Bruce Peterson:

Artful creative departments and production departments have worked together to really put on a magnificent experience that I hope you enjoy it, and I hope it's a great success for Sydney.

Tim Stackpool:

Bruce Peterson there, the creator of Van Gogh Alive, which is proving very popular and the season has been extended due to demand, and part of that is due to the restricted access to each session. Significant social distancing is required, as well as many other precautions, and I asked the event manager, Gracie Valdez, about those operational aspects.

Gracie Valdez:

We want to make sure that we've exceeded expectations. That's our whole goal is to make sure that people feel comfortable leaving their houses and going to a live event and going into an enclosed room with as many people as capacity will allow, which we are being very conservative with. We have more than enough room, as you saw, to have a good kind of physical distance between you and your neighbour. We have signage, contact tracing, QR codes, hand sanitiser, temperature checks. We've got medics onsite, we've got sneeze guards, we've got all of the things that you would hope and more.

Tim Stackpool:

When you were brought onto this job and you thought, "Wow, this is a daunting task." Did you consider that you would have to go to the extent that you have gone to, to put this together? Or did you go, "Okay, we're going to exceed the expectations here. We're actually going to give people an experience here beyond what they would hope for in terms of public safety."

Gracie Valdez:

That's been the number one goal this entire time. This is perfect. There's no touch points. There's plenty of space within this glorious venue. So, everybody's really excited to get back in here. When I knew that that was our intent and our goal, it made me really excited. Yes, of course, it's a big list of things to do and to check off, but that's what makes people comfortable. There's all ages that love fine art, and we want to make sure that everybody feels comfortable

Tim Stackpool:

And speaking of fine art, and I know you're not necessarily the expert in this, but of course, putting this show together, I mean, you must be somewhat moved by the expansive nature of the artwork we're seeing here projected, and even just the work of Van Gogh himself. I mean, it's almost overwhelming in terms of how you feel actually being in this space and taking a look at this art.

Gracie Valdez:

Absolutely. It's brilliant. It feels like you're inside of the painting and you can see all the brush strokes, and just all of the delicate work that was done, but up close. It feels really visceral.

Tim Stackpool:

It's a very intimate experience. I felt that the quality of the imagery as well. It almost stands off the projection surface in terms of the definition that you see in the brush strokes. It's just amazing.

Gracie Valdez:

Amazing. Yeah. Just the detail is incredible.

Tim Stackpool:

Event manager, Gracie Valdez there talking about Van Gogh Alive now underway at Sydney's Entertainment Quarter. It is an Instagrammer's paradise. So, if you can't make it in person, there's plenty to enjoy online that's for sure, until you can, but for more info and tickets visit the official website, www.vangoghalive.com.au.

HYBRID AT MAAS

Tim Stackpool:

Now, on this edition of Inside The Gallery Podcast, to the Powerhouse Museum and the exhibition there called Hybrid. Looking at urban design, as it might or will appear in the year 2030. Open right now, it presents new commissions from nine design studios, responding to the pressing issues of our time and exploring the needs of the future home. The museum commissioned the design studios to work with researchers and practitioners from alternative industries, to create a series of furniture and objects exploring the rapidly changing global landscape, and responding to issues such as, the COVID-19 global pandemic, air quality, bushfires, rising temperatures and wellbeing. Creative Director, Stephen Todd, told me about the evolution of the project.

Stephen Todd:

So actually, Hybrid was the theme of Sydney Design Week. And we were having a design symposium, we were having various exhibitions and architectural show, all sorts of interventions around collaboration and cross-pollination. But the hybrid commission was always part of that and what happened when Design Week was canceled as a result of COVID, like a lot of the cultural programming at the end of March, the commission still went on because we'd sent out those commissions, the designers were working, and we were always going to get ... all of this work was going to come in around middle of August, some of it a bit late. So it was here. And then what happened, of course on the 4th of July, the Berejiklian government declared that the powerhouse would not close. And so there was a mad rush to put on some exhibitions. The Maton show went up in the touring hall, the Maton that was a bequest.

Stephen Todd:

And part of that was that it should be exhibited. So those hundred guitars went up real fast. And then we had seven weeks to put this together. And I've got to say, honestly, to watch this team work that fast, it was incredible. So you have seven weeks to put it together and here it is. And also that seven weeks involved, we were really lucky because we got to put it in the historical part of the museum. We were able to rip up some of the carpets, expose the concrete floor, really show off the architecture. That's why the interior design is quite sort of structural.

Tim Stackpool:

I mean, you were part of putting the brief together, but did any of the pieces necessarily surprise you in how the brief was interpreted?

Stephen Todd:

Oh yeah. Look, I mean, what we did, because there are obviously many, many more than nine design studios working in Sydney or connected to Sydney. We really tried to cast or do a lineup of those studios that really represented the spectrum of the way you can design from super modern to really isolate a problem and they find a solution to it. And that's the way Chels Wilson works, to really more conceptual or speculative designers like Elliot Rich, who is based in Alice Springs. And her work is based on a really deep and long conversations with the neuroscientist. And she came up with an empathetic mirror that reflects you back as some wildlife. And that was hand carved in Canberra. So each of them was really a long, to use that word, journey. Each of them was very, very specific to that designers approach to design. And each of them, we really worked with them to not get nine tables or not get nine people

working with fluid dynamics engineers. So we had to really create that sort of that topography so that there was a richness to it. And we hope that's what comes across here.

Tim Stackpool:

So far, it's been a calamitous year. Are you surprised at the level of serenity that has come out of these designs considering what we've been living through?

Stephen Todd:

And I think it's actually not at all. And it's really good that you picked that up and it's not at all surprising. Quite a few of them really are about meditateness and quietness. The three parabolic glass bowls by Rive Roshan, which is Ruben de la Rive Box and Golnar Roshan, a Sydney, Iranian designer, and her Dutch partner. They based in Amsterdam. They literally were sitting, they were in lockdown with their little two year old in their Amsterdam the canal side flat for two and a half months over that European spring. And they just watched the light bounce off the canal and move its way across the room. And they translated that by these pendulums to Australia. So it's really about quietness and meditation. Andrew Simpson, Andrew is a studio called Vert Studio, which is, does a lot of beautiful work. Very, very industrial work from sunglasses to boats and things.

Stephen Todd:

And he wanted to really interpret this idea of the meditative shrine or a secular shrine. And that was part of a nod to that idea of demographic shifts that we're going to have different cultural mixes in Australia. So what can we learn from Asian cultures about meditation. And for him, we've put in an Asian object, but he said it could be a photo of your granddad. So yeah, so meditation was wasn't surprising. And also Thea and Tom Fereday stuff is really about having small pieces in an intimate space and being able to move and watch the light reflect through glass and things like that.

Tim Stackpool:

Creative director from the powerhouse, Stephen Todd, there. Now one unique piece amongst the many in the exhibition is actually a representation of a headstone, which is formulated by processing and reusing the material possessions of the person that it commemorates. Designed Duo GibsonKarlo in collaboration with Australian research council laureate, professor Veena Sahajwalla, explored this concept of memorial and its implications for those left behind. The professor is with the 'SMaRT' Centre for Sustainable Materials, Research and Technology at the University of New South Wales. And I asked her about both the practical and artistic merit behind the piece.

Veena Sahajwalla:

Yeah. So at the Smart Centre, we have the philosophy that we need to be able to show that different types of materials never should go to waste. And in this particular case, we've got waste fabric and glass, and it's our new technology that we have produced green ceramics. And green ceramics is all about the hybrid, which is what we're talking about here today. Bringing together very unlikely partners in this case, waste glass and textile, to create these green ceramics in our own micro factory at UNSW here in Sydney. So it shows that you can take anything that might reach the end of its life and transform into a useful value added product and bring materials and products back to life over and over again.

Tim Stackpool:

So here we are, moving away from the traditional granite production of a headstone and recycling the material for something which is used many, many times a day, and installed many, many times a day.

Veena Sahajwalla:

Yes, no, it's interesting. When you look at life that life is really all about, in many cases, your possessions that you have with you. And I think ultimately when we think about how we can bring these materials, recycle it and reform it into different ways so that the materials actually never really die. They're kept in our life forever and ever when we can find a way to put it back into use. So that ability to kind of bring things back to life over and over again, is something that's so fantastic about what we're doing at the Smart Centre, in terms of, and our micro factories being a way to demonstrate that localised production and closing the loop on our materials locally in our economy is going to be so important for the future. Supporting local manufacturing and enabling that to happen by using recycled materials, whether it's green ceramics in this particular case, or indeed products that are made out of metals. In all of these cases were shown at the Smart Centre that you can actually use end-of-life products and rebirth them, bring them back to life again.

Tim Stackpool:

And do you see the art world as particularly embracing this opportunity is as well? I'm thinking about the collision between industrial design and art. Can you see perhaps artists and artisans throughout the world actually looking more towards the recycling of materials in order to be able to do this?

Veena Sahajwalla:

Yeah, it's a really good point that standing here in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences that we want to bring together the world of art and science and design, because I think it really just goes to show that we can work together across discipline boundaries, collaborate and inspire everybody else. So artists can play a big part. Designers can play a big part in collaborating with scientists and engineers. And if we all work together and create beautiful, inspiring pieces like this one, I have to give all credit to the designers, Nick and Sarah who have done such a fabulous job. And of course the museum for making this happen.

Tim Stackpool:

Australian research council aureate professor Veena Sahajwalla there. Now this exhibition could be seen as a bit of a departure from what most might expect from the Powerhouse museum, normally associated with design and industry from the past. So I asked museum chief executive, Lisa Haviilah, whether this is a sign of things to come

Lisa Haviilah:

Well, the museum over the last 140 years has been an incredible, not only repository, but communicator back to the community. Really amplifying, promoting, and engaging the community with great innovation and ingenuity. And I really see this project HYBRID as a continuation of that legacy about showing not only the thinking, the design thinking that's in our community currently, but also supporting designers to think into the future. And that's really a very important role that I see the museum place.

Tim Stackpool:

The podcasts over the past year we've talked a lot about the agility required of institutions and individuals because of the year we've had to live through. How has your team handled all of that? And in particular, in getting this exhibition up?

Lisa Havilah:

Well, I think everyone is rethinking, reviewing and renewing, in our case, not only our institution, but how we work within it. And it's been so fantastic from my perspective to see our really incredible museum team have their own incredible ingenuity in terms of how they collaborate, how they create, how they construct to bring forward this exhibition, which I think has a level of ingenuity to it in itself.

Tim Stackpool:

I also do have to ask you, I mean, since your tenure here at the museum, it has been somewhat tumultuous in terms of talk of moving the museum, public's reaction to that, the politics involved behind that. Now that all of that has been put to bed, is it a great relief to you now that you can actually focus on the business of the museum rather than the business of having to move the museum?

Lisa Havilah:

Well, one of the reasons I'm very fortunate to be in my role, but I'm very fortunate to be in this role at a time of very incredible renewal and extraordinary investment into our institution. So we're at the moment, we have a team of 120 people that are assessing, digitising and looking at our collection to make it more accessible. But we're also in the process of creating an incredible new flagship museum in Paramatta and beginning the process of talking to the community about how we renew Ultimo. So I don't think I can be luckier than I am to be involved in what is a really incredible and significant renewal process.

Tim Stackpool:

Powerhouse Museum chief executive Lisa Havilah there. And to learn more about Hybrid and the museum in general, head to [MAAS.museum](https://maas.museum) and click on the powerhouse link. Okay, that's [MAAS.museum](https://maas.museum) and click on the powerhouse link.

SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY

Tim Stackpool:

Let's talk about Sydney Contemporary, another regular art event that has migrated this year to 100% online. Launching with the moniker, Sydney Contemporary Presents 2020. It is showcasing more than 450 new artworks by over 380 leading Australian and international artists. Running through until the 31st of October, the project as always is designed to support the arts community. And this year takes visitors on a distinctly different artist-led journey of discovery, where the online visitor is encouraged to create a pathway to find the perfect artwork for them from hundreds of the newly created works on display and they are selling right now. Barry Keldoulis is Sydney Contemporary's Fair Director. Barry, thanks for joining us on the podcast again this year. You're doing okay at the moment?

Barry Keldoulis:

Good. Very Good. Yes.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, it has been a year of many adaptations, but when did you first decide that Sydney Contemporary was going to be a significantly different event this year?

Barry Keldoulis:

Oh, I'm trying to think of exactly when it was, but it was really when it became obvious that the government wasn't going to allow mass gatherings by September. I think it was probably around April, because we were ... I think like everyone hoping at the very beginning of it all, that it would come and go reasonably quickly.

Tim Stackpool:

I know, we had a lot of optimism.

Barry Keldoulis:

Yeah. And it was obvious that mass gatherings would not be allowed by September and of course subsequent to that, then you had the second wave in Victoria and some in New South Wales. So, we made the decision as early as we could for the sake of the galleries and the artists so that they could plan. Then we decided to go ahead and do an online platform, but something a little bit different from what other art fairs had done.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. And indeed your online experience this year is quite different to what we've experienced in the past from you guys.

Barry Keldoulis:

Yeah. Well, most art fairs have done what they call ... They've tried to recreate the fair online almost literally by doing it by gallery and it's fine. But the feedback we had was that they weren't - from galleries - was that these online viewing rooms weren't hugely successful. And from our point of view, part of what we think is our job is expanding the audience for contemporary art. So, we thought if going

into one of these more traditional, they're only a year or so old, but these more traditional online viewing rooms, you really had to know of the gallery and about the artists perhaps that you wanted to look at. Whereas we decided to try and perhaps recapture some of what's fantastic about a fair, which is that almost overwhelming sensation when you walk in and there's so much work by so many different artists and so varied, and there's the work by the artist that you know, and love and that you want to see and catch up with. But there's also so much work that will catch your eye as you wander around, that catches your eye and you become interested in.

Barry Keldoulis:

So, we have done it really with artists facing forward, if you know what I mean. So, that rather than go in via galleries, you can scroll through and see the work that catches your eye. And then that will lead you to the gallery. And for the galleries, it worked well because we've asked them for five works and suggested to them it's best to give us five different artists' works in quite different, perhaps mediums and styles. So, that for them, it's more likely that people will be led to their virtual door, because of the variety on offer. And somebody who might be looking for a painting, or something just sees this ceramic sculpture that grabs their eye and it takes them to the gallery's website. So, we wanted to make it a bit more fun as well. So there's also the decision tree or the selection engine that where you can go by various ways of describing an artwork to find the perfect work for you. And that's a bit of a fun game to play. And we're getting a lot of really good feedback and sales are being made.

Tim Stackpool:

What you do is you hold an art fair, if you like, but now you've had to become a web architect as well. Have you found that a challenging new talent you've needed to find over a very short period of time?

Barry Keldoulis:

Yes, certainly it's been a rapid learning curve for me and we decided to work with some young web designers and it was fascinating talking with these designers who really have grown up with the internet as opposed to somebody like me who, the internet didn't exist when I was a child and they talk in quite emotive language about the internet and on-site presentations and that, so it was really interesting. It really was interesting working with the young designers and they've done a fantastic job.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, Just going back to your clients, the galleries, how much enthusiasm did they have when you started talking about it having to be an online experience this year?

Barry Keldoulis:

They realised there was no alternative. There was just no way that large gatherings were going to be allowed. They've really come to the party and they've supplied us with very good works. There's only a couple, I think that thought well, we were going to have a solid presentation at the fair. So, we'll just put the work of one artist forward, but most of them have cottoned on to the idea of making it as broad and expansive and engaging as possible.

Tim Stackpool:

I'm also wondering Barry, considering the reach you've had in the past online, do you think this carries Sydney Contemporary further? Further outside the region now because of what you've had to do online.

Barry Keldoulis:

Look I suspect so, and I think we'll see over the next few weeks and months, because it is very easy to forward on a link to a friend, be it overseas or interstate, it's not that easy to get people to fly halfway around the world to a physical fair, although people started doing that. But I think this will be interesting because of course the internet goes pretty much everywhere and it will be interesting to see the engagement from overseas. And certainly then I think people will have a look at what we're presenting, even if they don't buy, we'll peak their interest in perhaps coming to the fair next year. Because a lot of good work really still needs to be seen in the flesh to be fully appreciated.

Tim Stackpool:

Oh, of course.

Barry Keldoulis:

So, the online efforts won't ever fully replace seeing work in the flesh.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. And I think there's a lot of enthusiasm generated by actually being there with a whole lot of other people as well. It's not ... I kind of liken it to being at the football match, or the soccer match where the crowd really get excited. You get motivated and enthusiastic by the people's reaction around you, when you're looking at the work, especially that you guys have presented over the years. So, that's the one thing that I don't think we've been able to recreate at all this year with all the online type of galleries and presentations that we've seen.

Barry Keldoulis:

And the young artist Abdul Abdullah that we got to do, the little branding GIF logo, the zeros of 2020 are talking heads. And he said that's pretty much what he knew he was going to miss because of the fair not happening this year was that sense of the whole art world being there and the conversations and meeting new people, meeting old friends, and talking about art. And so that's what he was really going to miss. And that's what his little identity captures a little bit of.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. So, I think maybe my perspective's a little bit different, but not only do I enjoy seeing the art and feeling the reaction that it generates within me, but actually seeing how other people react to it as well. The people watching aspect of it too. So, it's like a whole different dimension to what being at Sydney Contemporary does. But before I let you go, just let me ask about the artists' commissions that you're doing this year?

Barry Keldoulis:

Yeah. We've worked with The Copyright Agency and with the Performance Space who have their Live Works program in October. So it's worked out quite well, the timing. And so we commissioned Jess Johnson and her partner to reconfigure a VR work that had been shown and was beginning an international tour that got canceled as ... It's not exactly virtual reality, because you don't put on the goggles and everything, but you can experience the work in the 360 degree environment online. And then there's a wonderful performative work by a Koori artist and a Cherokee artist, separated halfway around the world in Sydney and New York where they will write letters to each other at dawn and dusk,

because it's dawn in New York when it's dusk here. And they read their love letters to each other at that time each day.

Tim Stackpool:

Barry, look, thank you so much for continuing Sydney Contemporary in at least this form. And hopefully we'll get to catch up face-to-face in 2021.

Barry Keldoulis:

Yeah. I look forward to it and thanks for having me on.

Tim Stackpool:

Barry Keldoulis there, talking about the many changes to Sydney Contemporary this year. And if you need reminding of the website, visit www.sydneycontemporarypresents.com.au until the end of October.